WHIRRAKEE

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MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE BENDIGO FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc.
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President	*vacant*		
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Treasurer	Ben Goonan		

Positions delegated by the Committee

Minute Secretary	*vacant*		
Excursion organiser	John Lindner		5448 3406
Syllabus organiser	Ben Goonan		
Librarian	Diana Collier & Maryann Hill		5443 0137
Garden Convenor/Secretary	Jan Orr		
Hall Management	Maurie Lewis (assisted by Rob Moors)		0407 427179
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Whirrakee mailing coordinator	*vacant*		
Website coordinator/Webmaster	Ben Goonan		

Membership of the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club is open to all those interested in Natural History. The subscription rates are: Single $40; Family $50; Concession: Single $35; Family $40. *Whirrakee* subscription only is $40.

General meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month. The venue for General meetings is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square. The meeting starts with members sharing their recent natural history observations. The invited speaker starts at 8:00pm and meetings conclude with supper. The Annual Meeting is held in September.

Committee meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 5:30pm. Members of the Committee are the Office Bearer listed above and the following members: Alistair White, Kerrie Norris, Diana Collier, Devi Shanty, Simon Hay

Excursions are conducted regularly and are advertised on the diary page of the *Whirrakee*. The assembly point for excursions is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, unless otherwise specified. Several interclub field naturalist campouts are held every year.

The Bendigo Field Naturalists Club is actively involved in local conservation issues. An **indigenous garden** has been established around the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building. Working bees are advertised on the *Whirrakee* diary page.

Bird Observing: Club members conduct regular bird surveys. Please contact Anne Bridley 5442 6188 or Glenise Moors 5439 6254 for details. Special bird observations should be reported to Anne Bridley 5442 6188. To propose bird observing excursions please contact Kerrie Norris 5447 8017.

WHIRRAKEE

Monthly Newsletter of the Bendigo Field Naturalist Club
Vol. 36, No. 4, May 2015
Whirrakee takes its name from the Whirrakee Wattle (*Acacia williamsonii*), which is virtually endemic to the Bendigo region

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Authors are responsible for the accuracy of the information they use and also for any opinions expressed in their articles. Contributions should be posted or e-mailed to the editor at least two days prior to the last Wednesday of the month. They will be included as soon as possible after they are received, although space restrictions occasionally require shortening of articles or holding them over till the following edition of *Whirrakee*.
Articles in *Whirrakee* may be reproduced, but permission should be obtained from the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club, and acknowledgment should be given to the author and the Club. Some back issues are still available on request.

Editor's Note
Some feedback I got from the last excursion was…'a great day, well organized, and finished with an excellent Quince cake and cuppa'. It thought this was a great assessment and that this is very much part of what our club should be about – so congratulations to the organisers!
As our club's 70th anniversary draws nearer, the speaker for this month, Peter Ellis will remind us of much that has been achieved, and may be some things that haven't, and there are sure to be many stories wrapped around this account. I consider Peter Ellis to be a living treasure – his memory continuously astounds me, so make sure you come along and witness it. One such story has been revived by John Lindner and can be found on pages 8-10. I love it. By the way, the plant collection John mentions there lives on at La Trobe University and two of Bob Allen's specimens had a recent sprucing up and showing at the Post Office Gallery at one of their special exhibitions. They are now back at the university.

Front page photographer: Joy Clusker
What are all these people looking at?
They are trying to work out what hollows out a stump such as this one. This was part of the April club excursion to see some of the grand old trees of Bendigo's surroundings. I am not sure what theories were discussed to be responsible for hollowing out stumps in the box-ironbark forest, but there are more action pictures of the excursion on page 4 and 5.

Short Notices

City of Greater Bendigo-Sustainability and Environment Committee.

The City of Greater Bendigo has invited the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club to nominate a member to represent the club on this committee.

The Environment and Sustainability committee is intended to be a high level strategically focused group. The purpose of the Committee is to provide the best possible advice, guidance and strategic representation to Council on matters concerning the natural environment and environmental sustainability more broadly. The committee will support Council and CoGB in the development of relevant strategy, policy and action plans and assist with community engagement and discussion around these issues.

The committee of the Bendigo Field Naturalists club urges members to consider taking on this role. The terms of reference and meeting schedule are available from the club secretary. Any member interested in taking on this role please contact the BFNC committee. The first meeting of the Sustainability and Environment Committee has already passed, the next meeting is scheduled for June.

Renewing the O'Keefe rail trail

The Friends of the Bendigo-Kilmore Rail Trail have been upgrading assets on the O'Keefe Rail Trail. One such working bee was repainting the trail's road signs. At the same time they repainted the Bendigo Field Naturalist Flora Reserve signs off Bennetts Rd Junortoun (see photo on page 7).

Some of the group members have been gathering information (mainly historical, mainly railway related) on various points of interest along the trail (this is to help future interpretive signs that will eventually be installed by CoGB). If any BFNC members can contribute to the project (or to the naming of some un-named waterways over which the O'Keefe trail passes), please phone Garry Long. Mobile: 0409565404

May Excursion details – Bung Bong: Big Red Ironbarks

by John Lindner

Important note:
The following is only a shortened version for this complex excursion. Please get a full version from John at the May meeting or ask for an email version.

Location/Introduction
Bung Bong is a locality to the south of the Pyrenees Highway, just west of Maryborough on the way to Avoca. Lindy Lumsden, a wildlife ecologist based at the Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research in Heidelberg, now owns this 50 hectare block in the forest, which is covenanted under the auspices of Trust for Nature. The block is notable for its number of very large, very old Red Ironbarks which have somehow escaped the axe and the saw. Lindy has kindly allowed us access to examine these special trees and their habitat.

Date **Sunday May 17**
Duration Whole day
Meeting 8.30 am at the clubrooms in Golden Square
Leader John Lindner and others (Alistair White)
Notification Would you please let me know of your intention to participate at the May meeting or telephone (5448 3406 – leave a message if no answer).

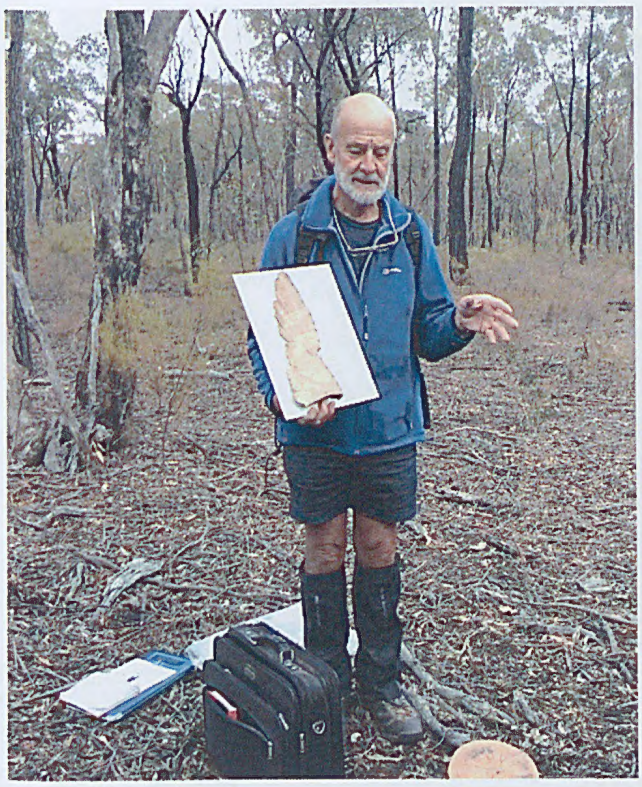
Weather Will proceed if it is slightly rainy. Will only cancel if it looks like heavy rain all day.
Car pooling Will be encouraged

Please bring Back pack, water bottle, sturdy walking boots, wind/rain jacket, hat and/or beanie, notebook, binoculars, magnifying glass, field guides. Morning and afternoon tea, lunch, folding chair.

Details of activity Walk to the block from the road and do a loop inside the fence, finishing with the return leg to the cars.
Total walking distance 4.2 km at a leisurely rate and spread through the day.

Continued on page 8

April 26 excursion to see some very big old trees close to Bendigo (Photographer: Joy Clusker)



Above: How to age a tree

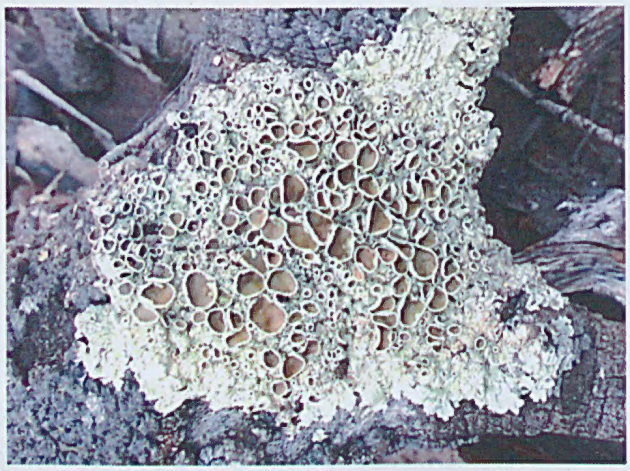
Above right: This tree was struck by lightening after a 3 month stretch of dry conditions, but no fire was started !

The big grey box dwarfs the observer… But sadly...some of the trees are struggling (see lower right)

The colourful group stands out in the autumn landscape

After the rain, the mosses and lichens on the Big Tree excursion were a sight to behold…
(photographer and identifyer: Joy Clusker)

Above: *Grimmia pulvinata*
Below: unknown lichen



Above: *Cladia* sp Coral Lichen
Below:
Heterodea muelleri, Ground-frill Lichen

Right: *Breutelia affinis*

Mandurang Images (Photographer: Karen Thomas)

Thalaina clara. (Clara satin moth) Karen found this moth in her shed.

Sheepwash Creek after the rain was a beautiful sight

Left and below: Images from after the burn. The echidna was in an unburnt section and feeding on ants. Rain can transform the burnt bush into artwork (below)

Eastern Yellow Robin (Photographer: Michael Angove

Left: The newly painted sign of the Flora reserve along the O'Keefe rail Trail (see article page 3)

Above: Weebill (Photographer: M. Angove)

Left: an overwintering house for insects. It was spotted on a farmhouse in southern Germany. It is practical but also artistic (photo by SW)

May excursion notice continued...

...Eucalypt topics
This is really a continuation from the Wellsford excursion in April. We will cover some of the following: basic measurements (height, diameter) growth rates; classification; strength and weight of large trees; how water is raised from the roots to the leaves; reducing moisture loss; role of big, old eucalypts in the habitat.
Other areas Identification of the under-storey plants and bird list

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Observation reported by Bill Holsworth
Date: 3 April 2015, in the Kennington area.
Peter Johnson, DSE officer, reported that pygmy possums have been seen in a garden near Kennington Reservoir, and the owner of the property sent Peter a photo.
Peter sent Bill a copy and he has confirmed that it is a pigmy possum.

An article from the old *Bendigo Naturalist* magazine by John Lindner

The people on whom our club was based
Bob Allen was one of the elderly naturalists with whom I made acquaintance when I first moved to Bendigo in 1979. I was very privy-leged to have known for a brief time nearly all the "old men of the tribe and guardians of the knowledge", before they passed away one by one: Tom Patullo, Leon Ruedin, Bill Perry, Jack Kellam, Jack Ipsen, Frank Robbins, Reg Smart (died 2013) and Bill Flentje (died only a few months ago). Margaret and Fred Watts of Inglewood should also be included, even though we saw them in Bendigo only occasionally. It was not only their learning and erudition that I sought, I was also attract-ed by their personalities and quirks, their generosity with their knowledge and the authority they commanded. They certainly were unique people.

Bob Allen the person
Bob was born in Echuca, and left school at the age of 14 to work on the railways as a fettler (general labourer). He worked in the Cohuna and Mitiamo areas. He was involved in active war service in New Guinea and Borneo (2-2 Pioneer Battalion). In 1950, he came to Bendigo and was employed by the Bendigo Timber Company in the timber yard. In those days, very little of the timber came ready-sawn in the vast range we have today: the timber yard man took the order and prepared it using a range of saws.

Such hardware and timber stores were located near the centre of town then. The shop-front was on the corner of Myers and Williamson Streets, the one with the unusual, outward-sloping lower windows. It is now a Forty Winks bedding store. After Bob retired, the Bendigo Timber Company moved out of town to Breen Street, but for some reason it did not survive, and had several transformations before finally becoming "Fit Republic" exercise gym.

Bob was quite an ordinary man to look at – you would never have picked him for a living encyclopaedia. He lived at number 20 Houston Street, just down towards the creek from the roundabout in Carpenter Street. The house is still there, a very plain, white weatherboard one, a little more forlorn then when Bob and his wife Em (Emily) lived there, when it sported a low front fence. They had two children, Judy (deceased) and Graham who lives in Geelong.

Bob was however a very friendly and jovial man. He seemed to have quite a humorous take on life and always had a joke or yarn to relate. As I reread the article below I can hear his rather gravelly voice and its story-telling cadences, and I can see his bemused grin.

But he was also extremely knowledgeable about plants, and was well known for his comprehensive, hand-written lists for particu-lar areas, and his herbarium collection of specimens mounted on white foolscap sheets and housed in manila folders. Each sheet had a hand-drawn border and handwritten label. I think this collection made its way to Latrobe University after he died *(see editorial)*. Bob was an expert and relaxed guide on nature

walks, and could easily translate complex ideas into terms that a layperson could understand. He knew the botanical and common names of all the plants, but was completely unassuming about this fund of knowledge. Bob was a regular contributor to the *Bendigo Naturalist* magazine.

The important thing for me is all this knowledge was completely self-taught, built up over many years by sending specimens to the Herbarium in Melbourne, talking to scientists and other naturalists and using the very limited references available at the time. And this was a man who left school at 14 years . . . This is a common theme for those early members.
The article from the *Bendigo Naturalist* below was accompanied by a small black and white picture of Bob, sitting in a garden chair, and simultaneously eating dessert, watering the grass and washing the dishes. I'm afraid it's not really reproducible with any quality.

Holding the hose **by Bob Allen**
(*The Bendigo Naturalist*, Volume1, Number 3, April 1968)
This is not an attack on the local City Council or the Water Commission Authorities as to the lack of water for the home gardener, but simply the observations of a naturalist whilst endeavouring to keep one's garden alive during water restrictions imposed because of one of the worse droughts in the history of Bendigo.*

Most people have not the patience to stand for hours holding a hose, but if you are a naturalist it can become an exciting experience. It is a job that must not be rushed, and so it reminds one of the good old days of the thirties and forties, when cars were rare and folks had nothing much to do and plenty of time to do it in. Not like the mad tempo of the world today, with people rushing in all directions and seemingly getting nowhere at all. The same mad panic can be observed on a large ant mound after some mischievous boy has trampled on it.
The allowable hosing time at the moment is from 5.30 to 8.00 pm, two and a half hours of pleasant relaxation during which time the TV inside is featuring births and murders, laughter and tears, love and hate and running fugitives. TV fans don't have to miss all this, as they can see it all happening in their own gardens, whilst holding the hose if they care to look for it.

Well it is 5.30, so let's get the hose going and take a ring-side seat. Enter the villains – twelve of them – flashes of green, red and blue, as the lorikeets shriek their way into the plum tree. Robbery is their aim, but they are foiled as a burst of water from the hose sends them screeching on their way. However there are quiet robbers operating here, who give themselves away by their pretty little song – the dainty Grey-backed Silvereyes.

Murder is being committed continually as I watch the bristly Lynx spiders pouncing on small moths and other tiny insects. The Preying Mantis skulks among the green leaves on the Swan Plant, and woe betide any insect that comes within its range. It impales bees on the spikes of its front legs, and then proceeds to casually tear them to pieces and devour them limb by limb.

It is not only the animal family however that claims victims, as an inspection of the Milky Kapok creeper shows. It is sometimes called the cruel plant, as at the moment, three cabbage white butterflies, having inserted their long proboscis into the flowers in their search for nectar have become trapped and died. Watch this plant however as the large pear-shaped fruits contain large numbers of black seeds attached to silken parachutes which are apt to sail all over the garden and become a pest.

One problem during the two and half hours is having tea, but one gets very good at eating and holding the hose. As a matter of fact the picture *(which unfortunately could not be reproduced)* shows the writer demonstrating how to :

1. Eat cantaloupe and icecream,
2. Hose the lawn, and
3. Wash the dishes all at once.

The last one occurring only when the lady of the house is busy talking to the lady of the next house on the opposite side of the house, if you follow me.

Butterflies are busy at present. The beautiful Wanderer glides lazily over the garden in search of the Swan Plant on which to lay her eggs, as she knows that her yellow and black-striped larvae will eat only the leaves of this plant. The lovely Dingy Swallowtail flits by, but she will not stop here as she is searching for orange and lemon trees on which to lay her eggs. Her colours are black, white and grey, with red spots on the lower wings.

The New Zealand Flax is in flower, and is being visited by the Red Wattlebird, the lovely New Holland Honeyeater and, for the first time in my garden, the Noisy Friarbird. The attraction is the upright tubular flowers which are full of nectar.

Spiders too are plentiful at this time of the year. The beautiful jewel-like Shiny Spiders have established themselves in a quiet corner under the almond tree, where every morning they can be observed busily spinning their orb webs to snare unwary flies. The remarkable Orchard Spider, which remains motionless all day long and resembles perfectly a piece of bird's dropping on a leaf, spends the day unnoticed, near her numerous round brown egg sacs, and will come to life at dusk.

Most things mentioned in the garden up to date have been harmless to humans, but on lifting the cover on the water meter the real villain appears, the deadly Red-backed Spider with her usual collection of dead beetles, including the Pie-dish Beetle. This is the only thing in my garden that is not welcome, and I strongly recommend to all who come in contact with this spider to kill it on sight. Two other interesting little fellows are the Tailed Spider, which has an elongated body resembling a tail, and the little Triangle Spider, who folds her legs close to her triangular-shaped body and drops to the ground when disturbed.

The wattle tree is a favourite place for many insects, including the large Crusader Bugs with the bold crosses on their backs. These are sapsuckers who plunge their long stylets into the young shoots and extract the plant juices. Here are also to be found little white eggs on the ends of fine hairs. They resemble tiny parking meters and are the eggs of the gauzy-winged, golden-eyed Lacewing Flies, which are common around the porch light at night. The larvae do a lot of good cleaning up the aphids, and when they have sucked them dry, they place the empty skins on their backs to act as camouflage. The kiddies call them dustmen.

All too soon it is eight o'clock, and the show is over until tomorrow, when once again it will continue for those who can observe. Most of the old actors will again appear, but who knows when a new star will join the cast, and add further interest to holding the hose?

*Australia's Variable Rainfall (April to March annual Australian rainfall relative to historical records 1890 – 2004) indeed shows quite vividly that Victoria experienced extremely low rainfall for 1967 – 1968. Victoria is shown bright red, indicting 0 – 10 percentile.
This marvellous wall chart was produced by the Queensland Government, Natural Resources and Mines Department, 2004.

Acknowledgement
I am indebted to Peter Ellis (whose recollection by the way was that Bob came from Pira near Swan Hill – how are we going to sort that one out?) and Graham Allen, Bob's son who lives in Geelong.

Preview of speakers for the next months:
May and June (see back page)
July: Mr. Andrew Skeoch: 'The Biophony: The evolution of sound in the natural world'
August: Mr. Gerry Gill: 'An evaluation of Aboriginal landscape management practices viewed from the Anthropocene'

(for pre-view of **planned club excursions**, see back page and the April Whirrakee

Diary

All Club meetings are held at the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High St Golden Square, unless otherwise indicated.

Wednesday, May 13 7.30pm
This month we will be able to go backwards in time with Peter Ellis. His talk is entitled: 'Seventy Years On, Fifty Years Back'. All are welcome (bring your friends & relations too).

Wednesday June 10 7.30pm
In June, we will have another take on the club's rich history. Mr. Rob Watkins will talk about, 'Bendigo Field Naturalists Club: The first forty years'.

Club Excursions

Sunday May 17 **Big Red Ironbarks at Bung Bong**
Leader: John Lindner and others.
Location: Property of Lindy Lumsden at Bung Bong, between Maryborough and Avoca, (see page 3 for details)

Sunday June 14 **Fungi**
(the exact detail will depend on the weather, so stay tuned)

Family Nature Club

The Nature Club activities will continue in 2015, so look out for announcements or check out their website.
Registration:
Bendigonatureclub@gmail.com or 5443-1326
http://bendigofamilynatureclub.blogspot.com/

Wildlife Rescue & Information Network Inc.

W.R.I.N. is an organisation dedicated to the care of orphaned, sick or injured native animals. It is fully endorsed by the Dept of Sustainability and Environment.
Please call our Emergency Number for Help for Fauna in Need. Phone: 0419 356433.
WRIN meetings held on the 1st Saturday of the month at 1pm the Golden Square Senior Citizens Hall

Bendigo Native Plant Group meeting.

All interested people are welcome to come along. Meeting starts at 7:30pm on the third Tuesday of the month, Golden Square Senior Citizens Hall.
Next meeting: 19th of May.

South-East Australian Naturalists Network (SEANA)

The spring camp will be hosted by the Donald FNC. The dates are Friday 25 to Sunday 27 September. *Book early, as there is another function in town.*
Matt or Sabine have details of the program including suggested accommodation and registration form
(please request a copy if interested).
Payment needs to be made by 21st August 2015. For further information
Donald History and Natural History Group, PO Box 111, Donald, Vic 3480
Email dhgnhg@gjr.net.au

A new program has been released for the series of renowned 'Fungal' presentations.
Full Details and bookings:
http://alisonpouliot.com/projects_fungi_ecology.php
Information: Alison Pouliot 0439 764 344

La Trobe Art Institute'On the Map' Printmaking workshops and Field Trips

A series of Printmaking workshops and guided field trips, aimed at creating new experiences and opportunities to talk, explore ideas about how we see and understand the landscape.• Do one only, do some of each, or all • For people from all walks of life • No experience necessary!
Venue: La Trobe University, Bendigo, Printmaking Studio; Field Trips (Locations variable)
Bookings: limited places – booking is essential.
Online: www.latrobe.edu.au/art-institute

6th one-day Biodiversity Across the Borders Conference

Friday 12 June 2015 (see April Whirrakee).